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1-2009

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Recommended Citation

Kratsch, Heidi and Hunter, Graham, "Firecracker Penstemon in the Landscape" (2009). *CWEL Extension Fact Sheets*. Paper 13.

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Firecracker Penstemon in the Landscape

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Penstemon eatonii

Firecracker penstemon



Graham Hunter

Description: Bright scarlet flowers that shower from arching stems of firecracker penstemon have made this plant a favorite of many penstemon enthusiasts. The species is found throughout the West at elevations from 3,000 to 11,000 feet. It is adaptable to various soil textures but thrives in low-fertility soils. Like most penstemon species, its roots require excellent soil drainage. The bright red tubular flower makes it a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds. The common name for penstemon is 'beardtongue', named for the infertile stamen that protrudes from the flower and looks like a hairy tongue. Firecracker penstemon is cold-hardy all over the Intermountain West, and preliminary common garden trials indicate that seed source should not influence its hardiness.

Cultural Requirements:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| • Native Habitat | Widely distributed throughout the West. |
| • Soil | Well drained, low fertility, pH 7.0-8.0 |
| • Cold Tolerance | Zones 3 - 7 |
| • Drought Tolerance | High |
| • Salt Tolerance | Unknown |
| • Sun/Shade Preference | Full sun to part shade |
| • Propagation | Seed, stem cuttings, or division |

- Maintenance

Do not over-water or over-fertilize. Reseeds freely, so clip stalks after final bloom to prevent spreading. Susceptible to lodging (stalks fall over) and root rot diseases if over-watered.

- Problems

Landscape Value:

- Use in the Landscape
- Foliage
- Inflorescence

Borders, accents, rock gardens; often recommended as cut flowers. Basal leaves are ovate, upper leaves are opposite and lanceolate and slightly curled. Showy. Will re-bloom if spent flowers are removed.

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
• Color							

- Fruit (seedheads) Capsule
- Form Clumping, erect, few to many stems
- Texture Medium
- Ultimate Size 10-40 inches
- Rate of Growth Medium to fast; flowers in second year.
- Plant Community Most communities from subalpine to salt desert shrub.
- Availability "Utah's Choice" selection; (visit <http://www.utahschoice.org/natives/wheretobuy> for more information).
- Cultivars 'Richfield Selection'

Propagation: To start seed indoors, cold-moist stratify for up to 112 days, and sow into container to a depth of 1/8 inch. For sowing seed outdoors, sow seed in fall and cover with 1/8 inch soil. Pre-soaking seed with 500 ppm gibberellic acid (GA) prior to cold-stratification may improve germination rate. Division of mature plants may be done in spring or fall.

Additional Photos:



USU Herbarium

References:

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<http://www.nativeplantnetwork.org> (accessed 2 January 2009). Moscow (ID): University of Idaho, College of Natural Resources, Forest Research Nursery.

This fact sheet belongs to a series of fact sheets about Intermountain West native trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses called “Native Plants in the Landscape.” Look for others in the series by visiting <http://extension.usu.edu/htm/publications>, then clicking on ‘Horticulture’ and ‘Native Plants’.

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This publication is issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Noelle E. Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.